This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS ZAGREB 001304

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/SCE - BELL, BENEDICT

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV PREL HR
SUBJECT: STORM ANNIVERSARY: DEFENDING OPERATION,
ACKNOWLEDGING CRIMES

REF: BELGRADE 1489

¶1. SUMMARY AND COMMENT: GoC officials, members of parliament,
military leaders, war veterans, and the Croatian public
marked the tenth anniversary of Operation Storm, the military
action that liberated Serb-held territory in the so-called
"Republika Srbska Krajina" (RSK), in ceremonies across the
country on August 5. At the primary GoC commemoration in
Knin, former capital of the RSK, the President, Prime
Minister, and Speaker of Parliament delivered messages of
patriotism to an enthusiastic domestic audience and defended
the legitimacy of the operation to an international audience,
both in Serbia (reftel) and in the International Criminal
Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), which many
Croatians believe has criminalized Storm in its indictments.

¶2. All three leaders acknowledged that crimes were committed
in Storm's wake and insisted that those responsible must and
will be prosecuted. President Stjepan Mesic, Croatia's
loudest voice in support of war crimes prosecution, answered
boos and chants of "Ante, Ante" (referring to ICTY fugitive
Ante Gotovina) from parts of the crowd of 5,000 by saying
that no protest and no individual will stop Croatia from
implementing the law and continuing on its path toward
stability, democracy, and tolerance. Most radicals attended
an alternate event in nearby Cavoglave, organized by a group
of retired generals protesting the GoC's cooperation with the
Hague Tribunal. In general, foreign diplomats, including
Post staff, avoided all Storm commemorations.

¶3. While recognition of war crimes was carefully limited to
the aftermath of Operation Storm, an open call for their
prosecution from the highest levels of leadership on such a
highly-symbolic day for Croatians shows a new level of
political commitment on the part of Zagreb. END SUMMARY AND
COMMENT.

STORM: "PURE AS A TEARDROP"

¶4. President Mesic, PM Ivo Sanader, and Speaker of Parliament
Vladimir Seks were all effusive in their praise for the
magnificence and heroism of Operation Storm, which they
defended as justified, irreproachable, and clean. Seks took
the most nationalistic line, saying Storm ended a four-year
reign of terror of the criminal RSK. He put blame for the
exodus of Serb civilians squarely on then-Serbian President
Slobodan Milosevic and his team, who Seks said encouraged
local Serbs to resist their own country only to later let
them down. The GoC is not responsible, he said, but rather
those who prepared Croatian Serbs to leave in an organized
fashion.

¶5. Sanader emphasized that the purpose of Storm was solely to
liberate Croatian territory, perhaps responding to earlier
statements from Serbian President Tadic and PM Kostunica. He
said returning Serb refugees know this to be true, and no one
should be allowed to distort the truth about Croatia's
"Homeland War" and Operation Storm. The brilliance of Storm,
he stressed, cannot be overshadowed by events that followed.

. . . TARNISHED BY INJUSTICE

¶6. Sanader in particular called for separation of Storm from
the "tragic events, criminal acts, and injustice done against
Croatian Serbs before legal order was fully established." He
pointed out that the GoC is addressing these incidents and
extending a hand of reconciliation to establish new relations
in those areas.

¶7. Mesic stated that the country's future requires
acknowledgement that in the war there were those who fought
not for Croatia but for their own interests and who destroyed
what should not have been destroyed. Those who violated the
laws of war and committed crimes against humanity must be
held responsible, he added. Croatia is fair enough and brave
enough to admit what was wrong in its past and seek
forgiveness from those who were exposed to evil in its name,
Mesic concluded.
DELAWIE

NNNN